

NECKSAFE

NeckSafe is an educational programme created by Dr. Adrian Cohen in 1988 which trains those likely to be first at the scene of an accident (the “First Responders”) to deal with the Acute Management of Spinal Cord Injury (SCI).

As a doctor on Sydney’s Westpac Rescue Helicopter, Dr. Adrian Cohen flew over a thousand hours of trauma and rescue missions to accidents scenes, as well as transferring crucially injured patients from outlying hospitals to the state’s major Spinal Injury Units and Trauma Centres.

As he became interested in the causation of SCI, so too he learned more about its prevention: stopping the injuries from occurring in the first place and preventing the secondary damage from (often well-intentioned though under-trained) First Responders at the an accident or injury scene.

Critical research conducted by Dr Joe Toscano¹ at the Austin Hospital in Melbourne, Australia, as part of a doctoral thesis confirmed that up to twenty-five percent (25%) of all those sustaining a potential spinal-cord injury (SCI) actually deteriorated neurologically from the time of the initial incident till they arrived at definitive hospital care. Undoubtedly some of this figure represents the natural history of the traumatic condition involved, however it is undeniable that improper handling of the injured person contributed significantly to a worsened outcome in many of the cases.

The important conclusion to this seminal research is that up to one in every four spinal cord injuries can be prevented through education and awareness of their occurrence, and via specific and detailed instruction in the acute management of the spinal injured patient.

In 1990, Dr. Cohen wrote his first book about the management of spinal cord injury² and also created NeckSafe as a formal course within the Australian National Training Information Service (NTIS) framework. This was the first time a specific training course dealing with the Acute Management of Spinal Injury had been registered and nationally recognised.

Dr. Cohen has always believed that this subject is too important to be a minor part of a first aid course or other trauma teaching: the personal and social consequences of this \$20 million condition deserve a special focus, especially considering that simple steps at the first sign of potential injury can have profound positive outcomes.

Even whilst scientific attention turns to exciting new therapies for the treatment and potential reversal of spinal cord injuries, the prevention of many of these occurring in the first place is an extremely worthwhile goal.

Over the next two decades, NeckSafe became firmly entrenched in the minds and on the agendas of all those associated with pre-hospital care. Dr. Cohen has continued the development, refinement and delivery of this programme, and is credited as one of the industry-leading trainers in Acute Spinal Injury Management. His efforts over the past 25 years have prevented numerous SCIs, making what he has achieved well worthwhile.

Research on students of NeckSafe has shown that not only do they increase in the competencies required to handle a Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) patient in the acute setting, but their confidence increases too. They are more willing and more able to participate at the scene of the accident.

Every year, new advances in approaches and in the equipment used to manage acute SCIs mean potentially fewer patients in Spinal Units. It is Dr. Cohen’s sincere hope that the dissemination of the NeckSafe principles will continue to help decrease the number and severity of Acute SCIs encountered each year.

¹ Toscano J, Prevention of Neurological Deterioration before admission to a spinal cord unit Paraplegia 26 (1988) 143-50

² The Acute Management of Spinal Injuries CIG Press, 1990